

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An apparatus for filtering electronic mail and notifying a user, residing on a set top box connected between a television content provider, an Internet provider having an e-mail server, and a television, comprising;

5 a software program which enables a user to specify e-mail filter criteria and notification icons which then retains and stores said e-mail filter criteria and icons;

10 a querying module contained within said software program which queries said e-mail server to determine whether e-mail fulfilling said e-mail filter criteria has arrived at said e-mail server;

15 a notifying module also contained within said software program wherein, upon arrival of an e-mail fulfilling said criteria, said application notifies the user by posting said notification icons to the set top box.

20 2. An application as in claim 1, wherein the connection between said set top box and said e-mail server is permanent, so that said application continually queries said e-mail server.

25 3. An application as in claim 1, wherein

the connection between said set top box and said e-mail server is non-permanent, so that said application queries said e-mail server at specific timed intervals.

5 4. An application as in claim 1, wherein
 said set top box contains an multi-tasking Operating
System and said application runs on top of said Operating
System.

10 5. An application as in claim 1, wherein
 said set top box contains an single-tasking Operating
System and said application remains in memory as a
Terminate and Stay Resident program and runs
intermittently at user-configurable intervals.

15 6. An application as in claim 1, wherein
 said application notifies the user of the existing of
e-mail messages fulfilling said e-mail filter criteria
through a notification icon on the television screen.

20 7. An application as in claim 6, wherein
 said notification icon is configurable by the user,
and reflects the content of the e-mail filter criteria.

25 8. An application as in claim 1, wherein
 said application notifies the user through the use of
an tone generated through the television speaker.

9. An application as in claim 8, wherein
said tone is configurable by the user, and reflects
the content of the e-mail filter criteria.

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10. An application as in claim 6, wherein
said application notifies the user of a plurality of
said e-mail messages wherein each e-mail message satisfies
different filter criteria and has a different user
notification icon.

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11. An application as in claim 1, wherein
said application queries said e-mail server upon
power-up of said set top box, and immediately notifies the
user of the existence of any e-mail messages satisfying
the user-specified e-mail filter criteria.

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12. An application as in claim 1, wherein
said application notifies the user via a pager rather
than through said set top box.

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13. An application as in claim 1, wherein
said application notifies the user of the existence
of a telephone call with Caller ID satisfying said filter
criteria, instead of an e-mail message.

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14. An application as in claim 1, wherein

said application notifies the user of another user attempting to make Instant Message contact with said first user.

5 15. An application as in claim 1, wherein
 newer versions of said application are downloaded to
 said set top box by said Internet provider.

10 16. An application as in claim 15, wherein
 said downloading of newer versions can distinguish
 between different types of set top boxes, and make
 adjustments to the content of said download accordingly.

15 17. An application as in claim 1, wherein
 said application is not resident on said set top box,
 but is resident on said e-mail server.

20 18. An application as in claim 1, wherein
 said set top box is connected to said e-mail server
 through a middle server, where said application is
 resident on said middle server.

25 19. A method of filtering e-mail messages and
 notifying a user, comprising:

 installing a software program on a set top box,
 wherein said set top box is connected both to a TV content
 provider and an e-mail server;

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configuring said program with specific e-mail criteria and also notification symbols;

queueing incoming e-mail messages at said e-mail server;

5 querying said e-mail server as to whether any of said queued messages fulfill said criteria; and

notifying a user that e-mail messages fulfilling said criteria are available on said e-mail server.

10 20. An e-mail filtering and notification application, comprising:

a set top box, connected between a TV content provider, an Internet provider having an e-mail server, and a TV;

15 user-input means for allowing a user to specify e-mail filter criteria and notification icons;

retaining and storing means for retaining and storing said criteria and icons;

querying means, for querying said e-mail server to determine whether e-mail fulfilling said user criteria has arrived at said e-mail server;

notification means for notifying the user of said arrival by posting said notification icons to the Set Top Box.

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21. An software application for filtering electronic mail and notifying a user, residing on a set top box

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connected between a television content provider, an Internet provider having an e-mail server, and a television, comprising;

5 said software program enabling a user to specify e-mail filter criteria and notification icons which then retains and stores said e-mail filter criteria and icons;

 a querying module which queries said e-mail server to determine whether e-mail fulfilling said e-mail filter criteria has arrived at said e-mail server;

10 a notifying module wherein, upon arrival of an e-mail fulfilling said criteria, said application notifies the user by posting said notification icons to the set top box.

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